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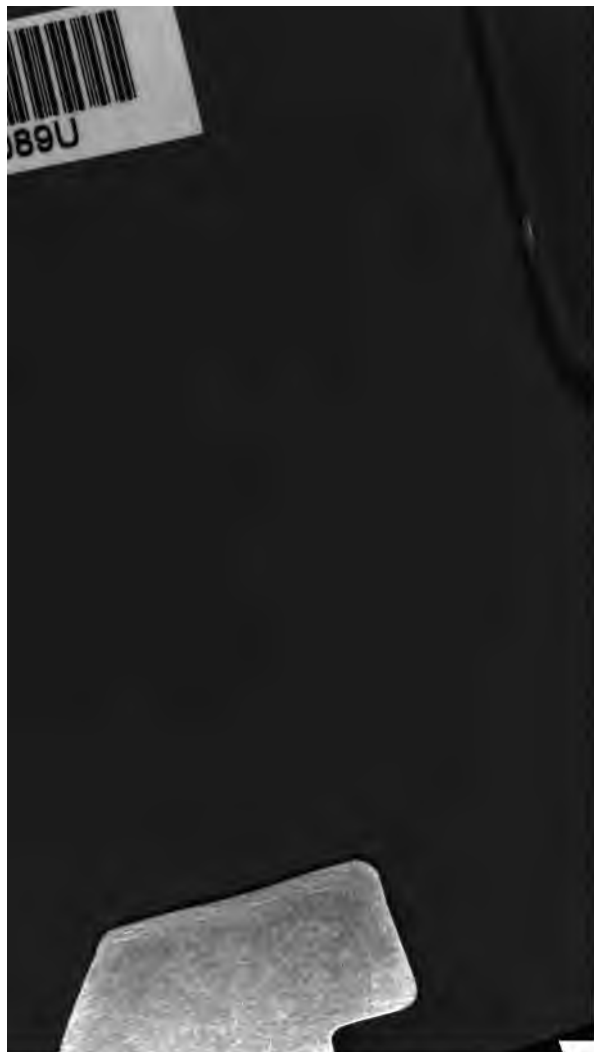
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# LADDIE

BY THE AUTHOR OF  
MISS TOOSEY'S MISSION





LADDIE.

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR.*

**MISS TOOSEY'S MISSION.**

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# LADDIE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF  
"MISS TOOSEY'S MISSION."



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1880.

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## LADDIE.



### CHAPTER I.

"THIRD-CLASS forward! Here you are, mum. Plenty of room this way! Now then! that ain't third, that's first. Come, look alive! All right behind there?"

Doors bang, a whistle—and the train moves off.

The guard had thrust into a third-class carriage, already nearly full, a band-box with a blue spotted handkerchief round it, and a bunch of Michaelmas daisies, southernwood, and rosemary<sup>1571</sup> tucked under the knot at the top<sup>1572</sup> of it.  
B

marketing-basket, one flap of which was raised by a rosy-cheeked apple emitting a powerful smell; a bundle done up in a handkerchief of the same pattern as that round the bandbox, only bright yellow; a large cotton umbrella of a pale green colour, with a decided waist to it, and a pair of pattens! Anything else? Oh yes, of course! there was an old woman who belonged to the things but she was so small and frightened and overwhelmed that she appeared quite a trifle beside her belongings, and might easily have been overlooked altogether. She remained just where the guard had pushed her, standing in the carriage, clutching as many of her things as she could keep hold of, and being jerked by the motion of the train, now against a burly bricklayer, and now against his red-faced wife who sat opposite, while her dazzled, blinking eyes followed the hedges and banks that whirled past, and her breath came with a catch and a gasp *every time a bridge crossed the line, as if it were a wave coming over her.* Her

fellow-travellers watched her, in silence at first, having rather resented her entrance, as the carriage was already sufficiently full ; but when a sudden lurch of the train sent her violently forward against a woman, from whom she cannoned off against the bricklayer and flattened her drawn black-satin bonnet out of all shape, the man found his tongue, which was a kind one, though slow in moving.

"Hold hard, missus!" he said, "we don't pay nothing extra for sitting down, so maybe you could stow some of them traps of yours under the seat, and make it kind of more comfortable all round. Here, mother, lend a hand with the old lady's things, can't you? That's my missus, mum, that is, my better arf, as the saying is, and no chap needn't wish for a better, though I say it as shouldn't."

This remark produced a playful kick, and a "Get along with you!" from the red-faced wife, which did not show it *was taken amiss*, but that she was pleased

with the delicate compliment, and she helped to arrange the various baskets and bundles with great energy and good-nature.

"Now that's better, ain't it? Now you can just set yourself down. Lor' bless the woman! whatever is she frightened at?"

For the bustling arrangements were seriously alarming to the old woman, who was not sure that a sudden movement might not upset the train, or that, if she let go of anything in an unguarded moment, she might not fall out and be whirled off like those hurrying blackberry-bushes or patches of chalk on the embankment, though, indeed, it was only her pattens and umbrella that she was clutching as her one protection. The first thing that roused her from her daze of fear was the bricklayer's little boy beginning to cry, or, as his mother called it, "to beller," in consequence of his mother's elbow coming sharply in contact with his head; and, at the sound, the old woman's hand let go of the umbrella and

felt for the marketing-basket, and drew out one of the powerful, yellow apples, and held it out towards the sufferer. The "bellerin" stopped instantaneously at such a refreshing sight, even while the mouth was wide open and two tears forcing their way laboriously out of the eyes. Finding that she could accomplish this gymnastic feat without any dangerous results, the old woman seemed to gain more confidence, seated herself more comfortably, straightened her bonnet, smiled at the bricklayer, nodded to the little boy, and, by the time the train stopped at the next station, felt herself quite a bold and experienced traveller.

"This ain't London, I take it?" she asked, in a little, thin, chirrupy voice.

"London? bless you! no. If you're bound for London you'll have another five hours to go before you can get there."

"Oh yes, I know as it's a terrible long way off, but we seemed coming along at such a pace as there wasn't no knowing."

"You ain't used to travelling, seem-ings?"

"Oh! I've been about as much as most folks. I've been to Martel a smartish few times when Laddie was there, and once I went to Bristol when I was a gal keeping company with my master, but that ain't yesterday, you'll be thinking."

"Martel's a nice place, I've heard tell?"

"So it be; but it's a terrible big place, however."

"You'll find London a pretty sight bigger."

"I know London pretty well, though I haven't never been there, for Laddie, he's been up there nigh about fifteen year, and he's told me a deal about it. I know as it's all rubbish what folks say about the streets being paved with gold and such like, though the young folks do get took in; but Laddie, he says to me, 'Mother,' says he, 'London is paved with hard work like any other town, but,' he says, 'good honest work is worth it's weight in gold any day;' so it's something *more than* a joke after all."

The old woman grew garrulous as the train rushed along. Laddie was a subject, evidently, upon which her tongue could not help being eloquent.

"An old hen with one chick," the bricklayer whispered to his wife; but they listened good-naturedly enough to the stories of the wonderful baby, who had been larger, fatter, and stronger than any baby before or since, who had taken notice, begun teething, felt his feet, run off and said "daddy" at an incredibly early period.

Mrs. Bricklayer nodded her head and said, "Really now!" and "Well, I never!" inwardly, however, reserving her fixed opinion that the infant bricklayers had outdone the wonderful laddie in every detail of babyhood.

Father Bricklayer could not restrain a mighty yawn in the middle of a prolonged description of how Laddie's gums were lanced; but at this juncture they reached the station which was the destination of the bricklayer and his family, so the old woman was not wounded by the discovery

of their want of thorough interest, and she parted from them with great regret, feeling that she had lost some quite old friends in them. But she soon found another listener, and a more satisfactory one, in a young woman, whom she had hardly noticed before, as she sat in the opposite corner of the carriage with her head bent down, neither speaking or being spoken to. She had a very young baby wrapped in her shawl, and as one by one the other passengers left the carriage and she was left alone with the old woman, the two solitary creatures drew together in the chill November twilight, and, by and by, the wee baby was in the old woman's arms, and the young mother, almost a child herself, was telling her sad little story and hearing Laddie's story in return. There never had been such a son; he had got on so wonderfully at school, and had been a favourite with everyone — parson and schoolmaster; "such a headpiece the lad had!"

"Was Laddie his real name?"

"*Why, no!* he were christened John



Clement, after his father and mine, but he called himself 'Laddie' before ever he could speak plain, and it stuck to him. His father was for making a schoolmaster of him, but Laddie he didn't take to that, so we sent him into Martel to the chemist there, to be shop-boy, and Mr. Stokes, the gentleman as keeps the shop, took to him wonderful, and spoke of him to one and another, saying how sharp he were, and such, till at last one of the doctors took him up and taught him a lot; and when he went up to London he offered to take Laddie, and said as he'd take all the expense, and as he'd make a man of him. He come to see me himself, he did, and talked me over, for I was a bit loth to let him go, for 'twas the year as the master died; he died just at fall and Laddie went at Christmas, and I was feeling a bit unked and lonesome."

"Were that long ago?"

"Yes; 'twere a goodish time. Fifteen year come Christmas."

"But you'll have seen him many a time *since*?"

"Well, no, I ain't. Many's the time as he's been coming down, but something always come between. Once he had fixed the very day and all, and then he were called off on business to Brighton or somewhere. That were a terrible disappointment to the boy; my heart were that sore for him as I nearly forgot how much I'd been longing for it myself."


"But he'll have wrote?"

"Bless you, yes! he's a terrible one for his mother, he is. He've not written so much of late maybe; but then folks is that busy in London they hasn't the time to do things as we has in the country; but I'll warrant he've written to me every time he had a spare moment; and so when I sees old Giles the postman come up, and I says, 'Anything for me, master?' and he says 'Nothing for you to-day, mum' (for I were always respected in Sunnybrook from a girl up), I thinks to myself, thinks I, 'it ain't for want of the will as my Laddie hasn't wrote.' And then the presents as he'd send me, bless his heart! Bank-notes it were at first,

till he found as I just paid 'em into the bank and left 'em there; for what did I want with bank-notes? And then he sent me parcels of things, silk gownds fit for a duchess, and shawls all the colours of the rainbow, till I almost began to think he'd forgot what sort of an old body I be. Just to think of the likes of me in such fine feathers! And there were flannel enough for a big family, and blankets; and then he sent tea and sugar, I don't know how many pounds of it; but it were good and no mistake, and I'd like a cup of it now for you and me, my dear."

"And have he sent for you now to come and live with him?"

"No, he don't know nothing about it, and I mean to take him all by surprise. Old Master Heath, as my cottage belongs to, died this summer, and the man as took his farm wants my cottage for his shepherd, and he give me notice to quit. I felt it a bit and more, for I'd been in that cottage thirty-five year; spring and fall, and I knows every crack and cranny



about it, and I fretted terrible at first; but at last I says to myself, 'Don't you go for to fret, go right off to Laddie, and he'll make a home for you and glad;' and so I just stored my things away and come right off."

"He've been doing well in London?"

"Well, my Laddie's a gentleman! He's a regular doctor, and keeps a carriage, and has a big house and servants. Mr. Mason, our parish doctor, says as he's one of the first doctors in London, and that I may well be proud of him. Bless me! how pleased the boy will be to see his old mother! Maybe I shall see him walking in the streets, but if I don't I'll find his house and creep in at the back door so as he shan't see me, and tell the gal to say to the doctor (doctor, indeed! my Laddie!) as some one wants to see him very particular. And then——." The old woman broke down here half-sobbing, half-laughing, with an anticipation too tenderly, ecstatically sweet for words. "My dear," she said, as she wiped her brimming eyes, "I've thought

of it and dreamt of it so long, and to think as I should have lived to see it!"

The expectations of her travelling companion were far less bright, though she had youth to paint the future with bright hopes, and only nineteen winters to throw into the picture, dark shadows of foreboding. She had been well brought up and gone into comfortable service, and her life had run on in a quiet, happy course, till she met with Harry Joyce.

"Folks says all manner of ill against him," said the girl's trembling voice, "but he were always good to me. I didn't know much about him except as he liked me and I liked him dearly, for he come from London at fair-time and he stopped about the place doing odd jobs, and he come after me constant. My mistress were sore set against him, but I were pretty near mad about him, so we was married without letting any folks at home know nought about it. Oh yes! we was married all right. I've got my lines, as I could show you as there wasn't no mistake about it; and it were all

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happy enough for a bit, and he got took on as ostler at the George; and there wasn't a steadier, better behaved young feller in the place. But, oh dear! it didn't last long. He came in one day and said as how he'd lost his place and was going right off to London to get work there. I didn't say never a word, but I got up and begun to put our bits of things together; and then he says as he'd best go first and find a place for me, and I must go home to my mother. I thought it would have broke my heart, I did, to part with him; but he stuck to it and I went home. Our village is nigh upon eight mile from Merrifield, and I'd never heard a word from mother since I wrote to tell them I was wed. When I got home that day I almost thought as they'd have shut the door on me. A story had got about as I wasn't married at all, and had brought shame and trouble on my folks, and my coming home like that made people talk *all the more*, though I showed them my *lines* and told my story truthful. Well,

mother took me in, and I bided there till my baby was born, and she and father was good to me, I'll not say as they wasn't ; but they were always uneasy and suspicious-like about Harry, and I got sick of folks looking and whispering, as if I ought to be ashamed when I had nought to be shamed of. And I wrote to Harry more than once to say as I'd rather come to him if he'd a hole to put me in ; and he always wrote to bid me bide a bit longer, till baby come ; and then I just wrote and said I must come anyhow, and so set off. But, oh ! I feel skeered to think of London, and Harry maybe not glad to see me."

It was dark by this time, and the women peering out could often only see the reflection of their own faces in the windows or ghostly puffs of smoke flitting past. Now and then little points of light in the darkness told of homes where there were warm hearths and bright lights, and once, up above, a star showed, looking kindly and home-like to *the old woman*. "Every bit as if it

were that very same star as comes out over the elm-tree by the pond, but that ain't likely all this way off."

But soon the clouds covered the friendly star, and a fine rain fell, splashing the windows with tiny drops, and making the lights outside blurred and hazy. And then the scattered lights drew closer together, and the houses formed into rows, and gas lamps marked out perspective lines: and then there were houses bordering the line on either side instead of banks and hedges, and then the train stopped, and a damp and steaming ticket-collector opened the door, letting in a puff of fog, and demanded the tickets, and was irritated to a great pitch of exasperation by the fumbling and slowness of the two women, who had put their tickets away in some place of extra safety and forgotten where that place was. And then in another minute the train was in Paddington; gas, and hurry, and noise, porters, cabs, and shrieking engines—a nightmare, indeed, to the dazzled country

*eyes and the deafened country ears.*





## CHAPTER II.

**I**N a quiet, old-fashioned street near Portman Square there is a door with a brass plate upon it, bearing the name "Dr. Carter." The door is not singular in possessing a brass plate, for almost every house in the street displays one, being inhabited nearly entirely by doctors and musical professors. I do not attempt to explain why it is so, whether that part of London is especially unhealthy, and so requires constant and varied medical advice, or whether there is something in the air conducive to harmony; or whether the musical professors attract the doctors, or the doctors the professors, I leave to more learned heads to discover, only hazarding the suggestion that, perhaps, the highly-

strung musical nerves may be an interesting study to the faculty, or that music may have charms to soothe the savage medical breast, or drive away the evil spirits of the dissecting-room. Anyhow, the fact remains that North Crediton Street is the resort of doctors and musical men, and that on one of the doors stands the plate of Dr. Carter.

It was an old-fashioned, substantially-built house, built about the beginning of the last century, when people knew how to build solidly, if not beautifully; it had good thick walls, to which you might whisper a secret without confiding it to your next-door neighbour, and firm, well-laid floors, on which you might dance, if you had a mind to, without fear of descending suddenly into the basement. There were heavy frames to the windows, and small squares of glass, and wooden staircases with thick, twisted banisters—a house, altogether, at which housemaids looked with contempt as something infinitely less “genteel” than *the “splendid mansions”* of lath and

plaster, paint and gilding, which are run up with such magic speed now-a-days. We have no need to ring the bell and disturb the soft-voiced, deferential manservant out of livery, from the enjoyment of his evening paper in the pantry, for we can pass uninvited and unannounced into Dr. Carter's consulting-room, and take a look at it and him. There is nothing remarkable about the room; a book-case full of medical and scientific books, a large writing-table with pigeon-holes for papers, and a stethoscope on the top; a reading-lamp with a green shade, and an india-rubber tube to supply it with gas from the burner above; a side-table with more books and papers, and a small galvanic battery; a large india-rubber plant in the window; framed photographs of eminent physicians and surgeons over the mantel-piece; a fire burning low in the grate; a thick Turkey carpet; and heavy leather chairs; and there you have an inventory of the furniture to arrange before your *mind's eye* if you think it worth while.

There *is* something remarkable in the man, John Clement Carter, M.D., but I cannot give you an inventory of him, or make a broker's list of eyes and forehead, nose and mouth. He is not a regularly handsome man, not one that a sculptor would model or an artist paint, but his is a face that you never forget if you have once seen it; there is something about him that makes people move out of his path involuntarily, and strangers ask, "Who is that?" Power is stamped in his deep-set eyes and the firm lines of mouth and chin, power which gives beauty even to an ugly thing, throwing a grandeur and dignity round a black, smoky engine, or a huge, ponderous steam-hammer. Indeed, power *is* beauty, for there is no real beauty in weakness, physical or mental. His eyes had the beauty of many doctors' eyes, kind and patient, from experience of human weakness and trouble of all sorts; *keen and penetrating*, as having looked *through the mists of pain and disease*,

searching for hope, ay, and finding it too sometimes where other men could only find despair ; brave and steady, as having met death constantly face to face ; clear and good, as having looked through the glorious glass of science, and seen, more plainly the more he looked, the working of the Everlasting Arms ; for surely when science brings confusion and doubt, it proves that the eye of the beholder is dim or distorted, or that he is too ignorant to use the glass rightly. But there is a different look in his eyes to-night ; pain, and trouble, and weakness are far from his thoughts, and he is not gazing through the glass of science, though he has a *Medical Review* open before him, and a paper-knife in his hand to cut the leaves ; his eyes have wandered to a bunch of Russian violets in a specimen glass on the table, and he is looking through rose-coloured spectacles at a successful past, a satisfactory present, and a beautiful future.

I need not tell my readers that this Dr. John Clement Carter was the Somers-

setshire boy whom good Dr. Savile had taken by the hand, and whose talents had made the ladder which carried him up to eminence. The kind old doctor liked to tell the story over a glass of port wine to the friends round his shining mahogany (he was old-fashioned, and thought scorn of claret and dinners *à la Russe*). "I was the making of the man," he would say, "and I'm as proud of him, by Jove, sir! as if he were a son of my own."

It is quite as difficult to rise in the world gracefully as to come down, but everyone agreed that John Carter managed to do it, and just from this reason, that there was no pretence about him. He did not obtrude his low origin on everyone, forcing it on people's attention with that fidgety uneasiness which will have people know it if they are interested in the subject or not, which is only one remove from the unworthy pride that tries to hide it away *altogether*. Neither did he boast of it *as something* very much to his credit.

but to anyone who cared to know he would say, "My family were poor working people in Somersetshire, and I don't even know if I had a grandfather, and I owe everything to Dr. Savile." And he would say it with a smile and a quiet manner, as if it were nothing to be ashamed of and nothing to be proud of, but just a fact which was hardly of interest ; and his manner somehow made people feel that birth and breeding were after all mere insignificant circumstances of life, and of no account by the side of talent and success. "He's a good fellow, John Carter, and a clever fellow too, without any humbug about him," the men said, and the women thought much the same, though they expressed it differently. Indeed, the glimpse of his early humble country life, so simply given, without any pretence or concealment, grew to be considered an effective, picturesque background which showed up to advantage his present success and dignified position. It was quite true *that there was no humbug or conceal-*

ment about him, that was the very truth he told, and yet, somehow, as time went on, the words lost the full meaning they had to him at first. Don't you know if you use the same words frequently they get almost mechanical—even in our prayers, alas! they are no longer the expression of our feeling, but the words come first and the feeling follows, or does not follow? And then, don't you know sometimes how we hear with other people's ears, and see with other people's eyes? And so John Carter, when he said those simple, truthful words, grew to see the picturesque background, the thatched cottage, and the honeysuckle-covered porch, and the grand old patriarch with white hair, one of nature's noblemen, leaning on his staff and blessing his son; and he gradually forgot the pigsty close to the cottage door, and father in a dirty, green smock and hob-nailed boots, doing what he called "mucking it out," and stopping *to wipe the heat from his brow with a snuffy, red cotton handkerchief.*



But come back from the pigsty to the violets which are scenting the consulting-room and luring Dr. Carter, not unwillingly, from the *Medical Review* to thoughts of the giver. Her name is Violet too, and so are her eyes, though the long lashes throw such a shadow that you might fancy they were black themselves. It is not everyone—indeed, it is John Carter alone, who is privileged to look straight down into those eyes, and see the beauty of their colour; only he, poor, foolish fellow, forgets to take advantage of his opportunity, and only notices the great love for him that shines there and turns his brain with happiness. His hand trembles as he stretches it to take the specimen glass, and the cool, fragrant flowers lightly touch his lip as he raises them to his face. “Pshaw!” I hear you say—reminding me of my own words, “there is no beauty in weakness, and this is weakness indeed!—a sensible man, past the hey-day and folly of youth, growing maudlin and sentimental

over a bunch of violets!" No, reader, it is power—the strongest power on earth—the power of love.

He had been used to say that his profession was his lady-love, and he had looked on with wondering, incredulous eyes at the follies and excesses of young lovers; he was inclined to think it was a mild form of mania, and required physical treatment. And so he reached five-and-thirty unscathed, and slightly contemptuous of others, less fortunate than himself: when, one day, a girl's blue eyes, looking shyly at him through dark lashes, brought him down once and for ever from his pedestal of fancied superiority, and before he could collect his arguments, or reason himself out of it, he was past cure, hopelessly, helplessly, foolishly in love. They had been engaged for two days; it was two days since this clever young doctor, this rising successful man, with such stores of learning, such a solid intellect, such a cool, calm brain, *had stood blushing and stammering before a girl of eighteen.* If I were to

write down the words he said, you would think my hero an idiot pure and simple; the most mawkish and feeble twaddle of the most debased of penny periodicals was vastly superior to what Dr. Carter stammered out that day. But is not this generally the case? Beautiful poetical love-scenes are frequent in plays and books, but very rare in real life. There is not one love-scene in a thousand that would bear being taken down in shorthand, printed in plain, black type, and read by critical eyes through commonplace spectacles. Nevertheless, the feelings are no doubt sublime, though the words may be ridiculous. He was quite another man altogether (happily for him) when he went to Sir John Meredith, and told him plainly that he was no match for his daughter as far as birth went.

"My good fellow," the sensible little baronet answered, "there are only about ten families in England that can put their pedigree by the side of the Merediths, and it don't seem to me to make much difference, if you rise from the ranks your-

self, or if your father or grandfather did it."

"I can scarcely claim even to be a gentleman," the young man went on, feeling pretty sure of success by that time.

"Not another word, my dear boy; not another word! I respect your candour, and I esteem you very highly as an honest man—the noblest work of God, you know, eh?—though I'd like to hear anyone say that you were not a gentleman as well. There, go along! shake hands! God bless you! You'll find Violet in the drawing-room. Sly little puss! but I saw what was coming—and mind you dine with us this evening at seven sharp—old-fashioned folk, old-fashioned hours."

I think the wary baronet also respected Dr. Carter's income, and esteemed very highly his success, and having weighed the advantages of family and birth against success and income, had found that the latter were the more substantial in the worldly scales.

And so Dr. Carter was dreaming rosy dreams that evening in his quiet room, as

was fit and proper after two days' wandering in fairyland with Violet Meredith. But as the scent of the violets had led him to think of the giver, so it drew his thoughts away from her again back to springtime many years ago at Sunnybrook, and the bank where the earliest violets grew in the sheltered lane leading to the Croft Farm. Did ever violets smell so sweet as those? He remembered one afternoon, after school, going to fetch the milk from the farm, and the scent luring him across the little runlet by the side of the path, which was swollen into a small, brawling brook by the lately-thawed snow. He set down the can safely before he made the venture, and Dr. Carter laughed softly to himself to think how short and fat the legs were that found the little stream such a mighty stride. He was busy diving for the flowers among the layers of dead elm-leaves, which the blustering autumn winds had blown there, when a sound behind him caused him to look round, and there was the can upset, and the young foxhound quartered at the *Croft* licking up the white pool from the

pebbles. In his anger, and fear, and haste, he slipped as he tried to jump back, and went full length into the stream, and scrambled out in a sad plight, and went home crying bitterly, with a very wet pinafore, and dirty face, and empty milk-can, with the cause of his mishap, the sweet violets, still clasped unconsciously in his little scratched hand. And his mother—ah! she was always a good mother! He could remember still the comforting feeling of mother's apron wiping away dirt and tears, and the sound of her voice bidding him "Never mind! and hush up like a good little Laddie." His heart felt very warm just then towards that mother of his, and he made up his mind that, cost what trouble it might, he would go down and see her before he was married, if it were only for an hour or two, just to make sure that she was comfortable, and not working about and wearing herself out. His conscience pricked him a little at the thought of what a pleasure the sight of *him* would have been to the old woman, *and how year after year had slipped away*

without his going down. But still a comforting voice told him that he had been substantially a good son, and it was accident and not intention that had kept him away. "Anyhow," he said to himself, "another month shall not pass without my seeing my mother."

At this moment the deferential man knocked at the door and aroused Dr. Carter to the consciousness of how far his wandering thoughts had carried him from his consulting-room and *Medical Review*.

"What is it, Hyder?"

"Please, sir, there's some one wishes to see you. I told her as it was too late, and you was engaged very particular, but she wouldn't be put off nohow, sir."

"What is her name?"

There was a slight smile disturbing the usually unruffled serenity of Mr. Hyder's face, as if he had a lingering remembrance of something amusing.

"She didn't give no name, sir, and she wouldn't say what she wanted, though I asked if a message wouldn't do ; but she

said her business was too particular for that, sir."

"What sort of person is she?"

The corners of the man's mouth twitched, and he had to give a little cough to conceal an incipient chuckle.

"Beg your pardon, sir. She appears to be from the country, sir. Quite a countrified, homely, old body, sir."

Perhaps the odour of the violets and the country memories they had called up made him more amiably inclined; but instead of the sharp, decided refusal the servant expected "Tell her it is long past my time for seeing patients, and I am busy, and she must call again to-morrow," he said, "Well, show her in," and the man withdrew in surprise.

"Countrified, homely, old body." Somehow the description brought back to his mind his mother, coming down the brick path from the door at home, with her Sunday bonnet on, and her pattens in her hand, and the heavy-headed double *stocks* and columbines tapping against *her short petticoats*. The doctor smiled



to himself, and even while he smiled the door was pushed open, and before him he saw, with a background of the gas-lit hall and the respectful Hyder, by this time developed into an uncontrollable grin, his mother, in her Sunday bonnet and with her pattens in her hand.





### CHAPTER III.

**R**EADER, think of some lovely picture of rustic life, with tender lights and pleasant shadows, with hard lines softened, and sharp angles touched into gentle curves, with a background of picturesque, satisfying appropriateness, with the magic touches that bring out the beauty and refinement and elegance of the scene, which are really there, and that subtly tone down all the roughness, and awkwardness, and coarseness which are also equally there. And then, imagine it, if you can, changing under your very eyes, with glaring lights and heavy shadows, deepening, and sharpening, and *hardening* wrinkles, and angles, and lines, *exaggerating* defects, bringing coarseness

and age and ugliness into painful prominence, and taking away at a sweep the pretty, rural background which might have relieved and soothed the eye, and putting a dull, commonplace, incongruous one in its place. It was something of this sort that happened to John Carter that night, when the picture he had been painting with the sweet lights of love and childhood's fancies, and the tender shadows of memory throwing over it all soft tones of long ago and far away, suddenly stood before him in unvarnished reality, with all the glamour taken away, an every-day fact in his present London life.

I am glad to write it of him, that, for the first minute, pleasure was the uppermost feeling in his mind. First thoughts are often the best and purest. He started up saying, "Mother? why, mother!" in the same tone of glad surprise as he would have done fifteen years before if she had come unexpectedly into the shop at Martel; he did not even think if the door were closed, or what *Mr. Hyder* would think; he did not

notice that she was crumpled and dirty with travel, or that she put her pattens down on his open book and upset the glass of violets; he just took hold of her trembling, hard-worked hands, and kissed her furrowed old cheek, wet with tears of unutterable joy, and repeated, "Mother! why, mother!"

I am glad to write it of him, glad that she had that great happiness, realising the hopes and longings of years past, consoling in days to come when she had to turn back to the past for comfort, or forward to the time of perfect satisfaction. There are these exquisite moments in life, let people say what they will of the disappointments and vanity of the world, when hope is realised, desire fulfilled; but it is just for a moment, no more, just a foretaste of the joys that shall be hereafter, when every moment of the long years of eternity will be still more full and perfect, when we shall "wake up" and "be satisfied."

*She* was clinging meanwhile to his arm sobbing out "Laddie my boy,

Laddie!" with her eyes too dim with tears to see his face clearly, or to notice how tall, and grand, and handsome her boy was grown, and what a gentleman. Presently, when she was seated in the arm-chair and had got her breath again, and wiped her foolish old eyes, she was able to hunt in her capacious pocket for the silver-rimmed spectacles that had descended from her father, old Master Pullen in the almshouses, and that Laddie remembered well, as being kept in the old Family Bible, and brought out with great pomp and ceremony on Sunday evenings.

"I must have a good look at you, Laddie boy," she said.

And then I think her good angel must have spread his soft wing between the mother and son (though to her mind it seemed only like another tear dimming her sight, with a rainbow light on it), to keep her from seeing the look that was marring that son's face. All the pleasure was gone, and embarrassment *and* *disquiet* had taken its place.

"However did you come, mother?" he said, trying his best to keep a certain hardness and irritation out of his voice.

"I come by the train, dear," the old woman answered, "and it did terrify me more nor a bit at first, I'll not go for to deny; but, bless you! I soon got over it, and them trains is handy sort of things when you gets used to 'em. I was a good deal put to though when we got to London station, there seemed such a many folks about, and they did push and hurry a body so. I don't know whatever I should adone if a gentleman hadn't come and asked me where I wanted to get to. He were a tallish man with whiskers, a bit like Mr. Jones over at Martel, and I daresay you knows him; but he were terrible kind however."

John Carter did not stop to explain that there were many tallish men with whiskers in London.

"Why didn't you write and say you were coming?"

"*Well, there!* I thought as I'd give *you* a surprise, and I knew as you'd be

worrying about the journey and thinking as I'd not be able to manage; but I'm not such a helpless old body, after all, Laddie."

"Who have you left in charge of the cottage?"

"Why I've give it up altogether. Farmer Harris, he wanted it for his shepherd, and he give me notice. That's why I come all on a sudden like. I says to myself, says I, Laddie's got a home and a welcome for his old mother, and it's only because he thought as I was pretty nearly growed to the old place, and couldn't abear to leave it, that he ain't said as I must come and keep house for him long ago. But, bless you! I've been thinking so of the pleasure of seeing you again that I've pretty nearly forgot as I was leaving my master's grave and all."

"And when must you go back?"

"Not till you gets tired of me, Laddie, or till you takes me to lay me by the old master, for I'd like to lay there, if *so be* as you can manage it, for I've

heard tell as it costs a mort of money buryin' folks out of the parish as they dies in, and maybe it mightn't be just convenient to you."

John Carter busied himself with making the fire burn up into a blaze, while his mother rambled on, telling him little bits of village gossip about people he had long since forgotten or never heard of, or describing her journey, which was a far greater exploit in the old woman's eyes than Lieutenant Cameron's walk across Africa ; or dwelling on the delight of seeing him again. He paid little heed to what she said, pretending to be intent on placing a refractory piece of coal in a certain position, or coaxing an uncertain little flame into steadiness, but his head was busy trying to form some plan for getting himself out of his difficult position. He did not want to hurt her, or to be unkind in any way ; but it was altogether out of the question having her there to live with him. It would ruin all his prospects in *life*, his position in his profession and in *society* ; as to his engagement, he did not



venture to allow himself even to think of Violet just then. He knew some doctors whose mothers lived with them, and kept house for them, received their guests, and sat at the head of their table, but they were ladies, very different. The very idea of his mother with three or four servants under her was an absurdity. And this thought brought Hyder's grin before his mind. What had happened when his mother arrived? Had she committed herself and him frightfully by her behaviour. No doubt that impudent rascal was giving a highly facetious account of it all to the maids in the kitchen. Chattering magpies! And how they would pass it on! How Mary Jane would describe it through the area gate to the milk-woman next morning, and cook add a pointed word or two from the front steps as she cleaned them! He could almost smell the wet hearthstone and hear the clinking of the tin milk-pails as Biddy hooked them to the yoke and passed on with the story of his degradation. And he could fancy what a *choice morsel* it would make for Hyder

to tell Sir John Meredith's solemn red-nosed butler, behind his hand, in a hoarse whisper, with winks to emphasize strong points, and an occasional jerk of the thumb over the shoulder and a careful avoidance of names. This thought was too much for his feelings, and the tongs went down with an ominous clatter into the fender, making the old woman jump nearly off her chair, and cutting short a story about the dis-temper among Squire Wellow's pigs.

"There ; it brought my heart into my mouth pretty near, and set me all of a tremble. I reckon as I'm a little bit tired, and it have shook up my nerves like, and a little do terrify one so."

The sight of her white, trembling old face touched his son's and doctor's heart under the fine, closely woven well-cut coat of fine gentlemanliness and worldly wisdom which he was buttoning so closely round him.

"You are quite tired out, mother," he said ; "you shall have some tea and go to *bed*. I can't have you laid up, you *know*."

"There now! if I wasn't thinking as a dish of tea would be the nicest thing in the world! and for you to think of it! Ah! you remembers what your mother likes, bless you!"

In that moment he had quickly made up his mind that at any rate it was too late for that night to do anything but just make her comfortable; to-morrow something must be done without delay, but there was ten striking, and she was evidently quite worn out. He must say something to silence those jays of servants, and get her off to bed, and then he could sit down and arrange his plans quietly; for the suddenness of the emergency had confused and muddled him.

"I'll tell them to get some tea," he said, "you sit still and rest." And then he rang the bell decidedly and went out into the hall, closing the doors behind him. He had never felt so self-conscious and uncomfortable as when the manservant came up the kitchen stairs and *stood as deferentially as ever before him.*

He felt as if he had not got entire control of voice, eyes, or hands. His eyes seemed to avoid looking at the man's face in spite of him, and his voice tried hard to be apologetic and entreating of its own accord. That would never do. He thrust his obtrusive hands into his pockets, and drew up his head, and looked sharply at the man straight in the eyes with a "fight you for 2d." expression, or "every bit as if I owed him a quarter's rent," as Hyder said afterwards, and he spoke in a commanding, bullying tone, very unlike his usual courteous behaviour to servants, imagining that by this he conveyed to the man's mind that he was quite at his ease, and that nothing unusual had happened.

"Look here," he said, "I want tea at once in the dining-room, and tell Cook to send up some cold meat. I suppose it's too late for cutlets or anything like that?"

"Is the lady going to stop the night, sir?"

*The words stung Dr. Carter so, that*

he would have liked to have kicked the man down the kitchen stairs, but he luckily restrained himself.

"Yes, she is. The best bed-room must be got ready, and a fire lighted, and everything made as comfortable as possible. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir." The man hesitated a second to see if there were any further orders, and Dr. Carter half turned, looking another way, as he added, "She is a very old friend and nurse of mine when I was a child, and I want her to be made comfortable. She will only be here this one night."

He felt as he turned the handle of the consulting-room door that he had really done it rather well on the whole, and carried it off with a high hand, and not told any falsehood after all, for was she not his oldest friend and his most natural nurse? In reality he had never looked less like a gentleman, and Hyder saw it too.

They say a man is never a hero to his own valet. I do not know if this includes

men-servants in general; but certain it is that, up to this time, Dr. Carter had kept the respect of his servant. "I know as he ain't a swell," Mr. Hyder would say to the coterie of footmen who met in the bar of the snug little "public" round the corner: "but for all that he ain't a bad master neither, and as far as my experience serves, he's as good a gent as any of them, and better any day than them dandy, half-pay captings as 'locks up their wine and cigars, and sells their old clothes, and keeps their men on scraps, and cusses and swears as if they was made of nothing else."

But as Hyder went to his pantry that night, he shook his head with a face of supreme disgust. "That's what I call nasty!" he said: "I'm disappointed in that man. I thought better of him than this comes to. Well, well! blood tells after all. What's bred in the bone will come out in the flesh sooner or later. Nurse indeed! Get along! you don't *humbug* me, my gent!"

*There* were no signs, however, of these

moralizings in the pantry, or the fuller discussion that followed in the kitchen when he announced that supper was ready.

"Do ye have your victuals in the kitchen now, Laddie?" the old woman said. "Well, there! it is the most comfortable to my thinking, though gentle-folks do live in their best parlours constant."

Hyder discreetly drew back, and Dr. Carter whispered, with a crimson flush all over his face, "Hush, we'll have our talk when this fellow is out of the way. Don't say anything till then."

The old woman looked much surprised, but at last concluded that there was something mysterious against the character of "the very civil-spoken young man as opened the door," and so she kept silence while her son led her into the dining-room, where tea was spread with, what appeared to the old woman, royal magnificence of white damask and shining silver.

"You can go," the doctor said. "*I will ring if we want anything.*"

"He don't look such a baddish sort of young man," she said, when the door closed behind the observant Hyder; "and he seems to mind what you says pretty sharp. I thought as he was a gent hisself when he opened the door, as he hadn't got red breeches or gaiters or nothing, but I suppose you will put him into livery by and by?"

"Now, mother, you must have some tea. And you are not to talk till you have eaten something. Here! I'll pour out the tea." For the glories of the silver tea-pot were drawing her attention from its reviving contents. "I hope they have made it good. Ah! I remember well what tea you used to make in that little brown tea-pot at home." It was very easy and pleasant to be kind to her, and make much of her now, when no one else was there. He enjoyed waiting on her and seeing her brighten up and revive under the combined influence of food, and warmth, and kindness. He liked to *hear her* admire and wonder at *everything*, and he laughed naturally and



boyishly at her odd, little innocent remarks. If they two could have been always alone together, with no spying eyes and spiteful tongues, it would have been all right and pleasant, but as it was, it was quite impossible, and out of the question.

"It ain't the tea-pot, Laddie, as does it. It's just to let it stand till it's drawn thorough and no longer. Put it on the hob for ten minutes, say I, but that's enough. I don't like stewed tea, and moreover it ain't wholesome neither. This *is* a fine room, Laddie, and no mistake. Why, the parson ain't got one to hold a candle to it. I'd just like some of the Sunnybrook folk to have a look at it. It would make them open their eyes wide, I warrant!—to see me a-setting here like a lady, with this here carpet as soft as anything, and them curtains, and pictures, and all! I wonder whatever they would say if they could see? I suppose now, as there's a washus or a place out behind somewheres for them *servants*?"

Dr. Carter laughed at the idea of Mrs. Treasure the cook, and the two smart housemaids, let alone Mr. Hyder, being consigned to a washhouse at the back, and he explained the basement arrangements.

"Underground. Well! I never did! But I think I've heard tell of underground kitchens before, but I never would believe it. It must be terrible dark for the poor things, and damp moreover, and how poor, silly gals is always worriting to get places in London, passes me!"

Presently, when they had done tea, and gone back into the consulting-room, when the old woman was seated in the arm-chair, with her feet on the fender, and her gown turned up over her knees, Dr. Carter drew his chair up near hers, and prepared for his difficult task.

"Mother," he said, laying one of his hands caressingly on her arm (he was proud of his hands—it was one of his weaknesses that they were gentleman's *hands*, white and well shaped, and there *was* a plain gold strap-ring on the little

finger, which hit exactly the right medium between severity and display, as a gentleman's ring should), "Mother, I wish you had written to tell me you were coming."

She took his hand between both her own, hard and horny, with the veins standing up like cord on the backs, rough and misshapen with years of hard work, but with a world of tender mother's love in every touch, that made his words stick in his throat and nearly choke him.

"I knew as you'd be pleased to see me, Laddie, come when I might or how I might."

"Of course I'm glad to see you, mother, very glad; and I was thinking just before you came in that I would run down to Sunnybrook to see you just before Christmas."

And then he went on to explain how different London life was to that at Sunnybrook, and how she would never get used to it or feel happy there, talking quickly and wrapping up his meaning in so many words and elaborations *that at the end of half an hour the old*

woman had no more idea of what he meant than she had at the beginning, and was fairly mystified. She had a strange way, too, of upsetting all his skilful arguments with a simple word or two.

"Different from Sunnybrook? Yes, sure; but she'd get used to it like other folks. Not happy? Why she'd be happy anywheres with her Laddie. There, don't you fret yourself about me; as long as you're comfortable I don't mind nothing."

How could he make her understand and see the gulf that lay between them—her life and his? It needed much plainer speaking, a spade must be called a spade, and, somehow, it looked a very much more ugly spade when it was so called. How soon did she catch his meaning? He hardly knew, for he could not bear to look into her face and see the smile fade from her lips and the brightness from her eyes. He only felt her hand suddenly clasp his more tightly, *as if he had tried to draw it away from her, and she grew silent, while he talked on*

quickly and nervously, telling her they would go together to-morrow and find a little snug cottage not far from London, with everything pretty and comfortable that heart could wish for, and a little maid to do the work, so that she need never lay her hand to anything ; and how he would come to see her often, very often, perhaps once a week. Still never a word for or against, of pleasure or of pain, till he said,

“You would like it, mother, wouldn’t you?”

And then she answered slowly and faintly,

“I’m aweary, Laddie, too tired like for new plans ; and maybe, dearie, too old.”

“You must go to bed,” he said, with a burst of overwhelming compunction. “I ought not to have let you stop up like this. I should have kept what I had to say till to-morrow when you were rested. Come, think no more of it to-night, everything will look brighter to-morrow. I’ll show you your bedroom.”

And so he took her upstairs, such a

lot of stairs to the old country legs ; but her curiosity overcame her fatigue sufficiently to make her peep into the double drawing-room where the gas-lamp in the street threw weird lights and shadows on the ceiling and touched unexpectedly on parts of mirrors or gilded cornices, giving a mysterious effect to the groups of furniture and the chandelier hanging in its holland covering.

"'Tis mighty fine!" she said, "but an unked place to my mind ; like a church-yard somat."

Her bed-room did not look "unked," however, with a bright fire burning, and the inviting chintz-curtained bed and the crisp muslin-covered toilet-table, with two candles lighted. In the large looking-glass on the toilet-table the figure of the little old woman was reflected among the elegant comfort of the room, looking all the more small and shabby, and old, and out of place in contrast with her surroundings.

"*Now* make haste to bed, there's a *good old* mother ; my room is next to

this if you want anything, and I shall soon come up to bed. I hope you'll be very comfortable. Good night."

And then he left her with a kiss, and she stood for some minutes quite still, looking at the scene reflected in the glass before her, peering curiously and attentively at it.

"And so Laddie is ashamed of his old mother," she said softly, with a little sigh; "and it ain't no wonder!"

As Dr. Carter sat down again in his consulting-room by himself, he told himself that he had done wisely, though he had felt and inflicted pain, and still felt very sore and ruffled. But it was wisest, and practically kindest and best for her in the end, more surely for her happiness and comfort; so there was no need to regret it, or for that tiresome little feeling in one corner of his heart that seemed almost like remorse. This is no story-book world of chivalry, romance, and poetry, and to get on in it you must just lay aside sentimental fancies and act by *the light of reason and common sense.*

And then he settled down to arrange the details of to-morrow's plans, and jotted down on a piece of paper a few memoranda of suitable places, times of trains, &c., and resolved that he would spare no pains or expense in making her thoroughly comfortable. He even wrote a note or two to put off some appointments, and felt quite gratified with the idea that he was sacrificing something on his mother's account. The clock struck two as he rose to go up to bed, and he went up feeling much more composed and satisfied with himself, having pretty successfully argued and reasoned down his troublesome, morbid misgivings. He listened at his mother's door; but all was quiet, and he made haste into bed himself, feeling he had gone through a good deal that day.

He was just turning over to sleep when his door opened softly and his mother came in—such a queer, funny, old figure, with a shawl wrapped round her and a very large nightcap on—one of the old-fashioned sort, with very broad, flapping frills. She had a candle in her hand, and



set it down on the table by his bed. He jumped up as she came in.

"Why, mother, what's the matter? Not in bed? Are you ill?"

"There, there! lie down; there ain't nothing wrong. But I've been listening for ye this long time. 'Tis fifteen year and more since I tucked you up in bed, and you used to say as you never slept so sweet when I didn't do it."

She made him lie down, and smoothed his pillow, and brushed his hair off his forehead, and tucked the clothes round him, and kissed him as she spoke,

"And I thought as I'd like to do it for you once more. Good-night, Laddie, good-night."

And then she went away quickly, and did not hear him call "Mother, oh, mother!" after her, for the carefully tucked-in clothes were flung off and Laddie was out of bed, with his hand on the handle of the door, and then—second thoughts being cooler, if not better—"she had better sleep," Dr. Carter said, and got *back into bed.*

But sleep did not come at his call ; he tossed about feverishly and restlessly, with his mind tossing hither and thither as much as his body, the strong wind of his pride and will blowing against the running tide of his love and conscience, and making a rough sea between them, which would not allow of any repose. And which of them was the strongest ? After long and fierce debate with himself he came to a conclusion which at all events brought peace along with it. "Come what may," he said, "I will keep my mother with me, let people say or think what they will ; even if it costs me Violet herself, as most likely it will. I can't turn my mother out in her old age, so there's an end of it." And there and then he went to sleep.

It must have been soon after this that he woke with a start, with a sound in his ears like the shutting of the street-door. It was still quite dark, night to Londoners, morning to country people, *who were* already going to their work *and labour*, and Dr. Carter turned himself

over and went to sleep again, saying,  
"It was my fancy or a dream," while his  
old mother stood shivering in the cold  
November morning outside his door, mur-  
muring,

"I'll never be a shame to my boy, my  
Laddie; God bless him!"





#### CHAPTER IV.

**W**HEN Dr. Carter opened his door next morning, he found his mother's room empty, and it seemed almost as if the events of the night before had been a bad dream ; only the basket of apples, and the bandbox, still tied up in the spotted handkerchief, confirmed his recollections, and when he went down, the pattens, still on his writing-table, added their testimony. But where was his mother? All the servants could tell him was that they had found her bedroom door open when they came down in the morning, and the front door unbarred and unbolted, and *that was all.*

*"She has gone back to Sunnybrook,"*

he said to himself, with a very sore heart; "she saw what a miserable, base-hearted cur of a son she had, who grudged a welcome and a shelter to her who would have given her right hand to keep my little finger from aching. God forgive me for wounding the brave old heart! I will go and bring her back; she will be ready to forgive me nearly before I speak."

He looked at the train paper, and found there was an early, slow train by which his mother must have gone, and an express that would start in about an hour, and reach Martel only a quarter of an hour after the slower one. This just gave him time to make arrangements for his engagements, and write a line to Violet, saying he was unexpectedly called away from London, but that he would come to her immediately on his return, for he had much to tell and explain. The cab was at the door to take him to the station, and everything was ready, and he was giving his last directions to Mr. Hyder.

*"I shall be back to-morrow, Hyder."*

without fail, and I shall bring my mother with me." He brought out the word even now with an effort, and hated himself for the flush that came up into his face, but he went on firmly, "that was my mother who was here last night, and no man ever had a better."

I don't know how it happened, but everything seemed topsy-turvy that morning; for all at once Dr. Carter found himself shaking hands with Hyder before he knew what he was about, and the deferential, polite Hyder, whose respect had always been slightly tinged with contempt, was saying, with tears in his eyes, "Indeed, sir, I see that all along; and I don't think none the worse of you, but a deal the better for saying it out like a man; and me and cook and the gals will do our best to make the old lady comfortable, that we will!"

Dr. Carter felt a strange, dream-like feeling as he got into the cab. Everyone and everything seemed changed, and *he could not make it out*; even Hyder *seemed something more than an excel-*

lent servant. It was quite a relief to his mind, on his return next day, to find Hyder the same imperturbable person as before, and the little episode of hand-shaking and expressed sympathy not become a confirmed habit. It was a trifling relief even in the midst of his anxiety and disappointment, for he did not find his mother at Sunnybrook, nor did she arrive by either of the trains that followed the one he came by, though he waited the arrival of several at Martel. So he came back to London, feeling that he had gone on the wrong tack, but comforting himself with the thought that he would soon be able to trace her out wherever she had gone. But it was not so easy as he expected ; the most artful and experienced criminal, escaping from justice, could not have gone to work more skilfully than the old woman did quite unconsciously. All his inquiries were fruitless ; she had not been seen or noticed at Paddington, none of the houses or shops about had been open or astir at that early morning hour. Once he

thought he had a clue, but it came to nothing, and, tired and dispirited, he was obliged, very unwillingly, to put the matter into the hands of the police, who undertook with great confidence to find the old woman before another day was past.

It was with a very haggard, anxious face that he came into the pretty drawing-room in Harley Street, where Violet sprang up from her low chair by the fire, to meet him. How pretty she was! how sweet! how elegant and graceful every movement and look, every detail of her dress! His eyes took in every beauty lovingly, as one who looks his last on something dearer than life, and then lost all consciousness of any other beauty, in the surpassing beauty of the love for him in her eyes. She stretched out both her soft hands to him, with the ring he had given her, the only ornament on them, and said, "Tell me about it?"

Do not you know some voices that have a caress in every word and a comfort in every tone? Violet Meredith's *was such* a voice.



"I have come for that," he said, and he would not trust himself to take those hands in his, or to look any longer into her face, but he went to the fire and looked into the red caves among the glowing coals. "I have come to tell you about my mother. I have deceived you shamefully."

And then he told her of his mother, describing her as plainly and carefully as he could, trying to set aside everything fanciful or picturesque, and yet do justice to the kind, simple, old heart, trying to make Violet see the great difference between the old countrywoman and herself. And then he told her of her having come to him, to end her days under her son's roof. "I could not ask you to live with her," he ended sadly.

She had clasped her hands round his arm shyly, for it was only a few days since she had had to hide away her love, like a stolen treasure, out of sight.

"It is too late to think of that," she said, with a little coaxing laugh; "too late, for you asked me to be your wife

a week ago. Yes, John,"—the name came still with a little hesitation,—“a whole week ago, and I will not let you off. And then I have no mother of my own ; she died before I can remember, and it will be so nice to have one, for she will like me for your sake, won't she? And what does it matter what she is like, you silly, old John?—she is your mother, and that is quite enough for me. And don't you think I love you more ridiculously than ever because you are so good and noble and true to your old mother, and are not ashamed of her because she is not just exactly like other people?” And she laid her soft cheek against his sleeve, by her clasped hands, as she spoke.

But he drew away with almost a shudder. “Love me less, then, Violet ; hate me, for I *was* ashamed of her ; I was base and cowardly and untrue, and I wanted to get her out of the way so that no one should know, not even you, and I hurt *and* wounded her—her who would have *done anything* for her “Laddie,” as she

calls me—and she went away disappointed and sad and sorry, and I cannot find her.”

He had sunk down into Violet's low chair, and covered up his face with his hands, and through the fingers forced their way the hot, burning tears, while he told of his ineffectual efforts to find her, and his shame and regret.

She stood listening, too pitiful and sorry for words, longing to comfort him; and at last she knelt down and pulled his hands gently away from his face, and whispered very softly, as if he might not like to hear her use his mother's name for him. “We will find her, never fear; your mother and mine, Laddie.” And so she comforted him.

What an awful place London is! I do not mean awful in the sense in which the word is used by fashionable young ladies, or schoolboys, by whom it is applied indiscriminately to a “lark” or a “bore,” into which two classes most events in life may, according to them, be divided, and considered equally descriptive of

sudden death or a new bonnet. I use it in its real meaning, full of awe, inspiring fear and reverence, as Jacob said, "How dreadful is this place," this great London, with its millions of souls, with its strange contrasts of riches and poverty, business and pleasure, learning and ignorance, and the sin everywhere. Awful indeed! and the thought would be overwhelming in its awfulness if we could not say also as Jacob did, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not," if we did not know that there is the ladder set up, reaching to Heaven, and the angels of God ever ascending and descending, if we did not believe that the Lord stands above it. It seemed a very terrible place to the old countrywoman as she wandered about its streets and squares, its parks and alleys, that November day, too dazed and stupefied to form any plan for herself, only longing to get out of sight, that she might not shame her boy. She felt no bitterness against him, for was it not *natural* when he was a gentleman, and she *a poor, homely old body*?

In the early morning, when the streets were empty, except for policemen or late revellers hurrying home, or market-carts coming in from the country, with frosty moisture on the heaps of cabbages, she got on pretty well. She had a cup of coffee at an early coffee-stall, and no one took any notice of her; some of those that passed were country people too, and at that early hour people are used to see odd, out-of-the-way figures, that would be stared at in the height of noon. But as the day went on, the streets filled with hurrying people, and the shops opened, and omnibuses and cabs began to run, and she got into more bustling, noisy thoroughfares, and was hustled and pushed about and looked at, the terrors of the situation came heavily upon her. She tried to encourage herself with the thought that before long she should get out of London and reach the country, little knowing, poor old soul, how many miles of streets, and houses, and pavements, lay between her and the merest *pretence* to real country. And then, too,

in that maze of streets where one seemed exactly like another, her course was of a most devious character, often describing a circle and bringing her back through the same streets without the old woman knowing that she was retracing her steps; sometimes a difficult crossing, with an apparently endless succession of omnibuses and carts, turned her from her way—sometimes a quieter looking street with the trees of a square showing at the end enticed her aside. Once she actually went up North Crediton Street, unconsciously and unnoticed. She reached one of the parks at last, and sat down very thankfully on a seat, though it was clammy and damp, and the fog was lurking under the gaunt, black trees, and hanging over the thin coarse grass, which was being nibbled by dirty desolate sheep, who looked to the old woman's eyes like some new kind of London animal, not to be recognized as belonging to the same species as the soft, fleecy white flocks *on the hill-sides* and meadows of *Sunnybrook*. She sat here a long time resting,

dozing, and trying to think. "I don't want to trouble no one, or shame no one, I only want just to get out of the way." She was faint and tired, and she thought perhaps she might be going to die. "It's a bit unkind to die all alone, and I'd liefer have died in my bed comfortable-like; but there! it don't much matter, it'll soon be all over and an end to it all." But no! that would not do either; and the old woman roused herself and shook off the faintness. "Whatever would folks say if Laddie's mother was found dead like any tramp in the road? He'd die of shame, pretty near, to hear it in everyone's mouth." Poor old soul! she little knew how people can starve, and break their hearts, and die for want of food or love in London, and no one be the wiser or the sadder. It was just then she found out that her pocket had been picked, or rather that her purse was gone; for she did not wonder where or how it went, and, indeed, she did not feel the loss very acutely, though, at home in the old days, she had turned the house

upside down and hunted high and low and spared no pains to find a missing halfpenny. It did not contain all her money, for with good, old-fashioned caution, she had some notes sewed up in her stays; but still it was a serious loss, and one she would have made a great moan over in old times. She did not know that the sight of her worn old netted purse, with the rusty steel rings, had touched a soft spot in a heart that for years had seemed too dry and hard for any feeling. It had lain in the hand of an expert London pick-pocket, it was mere child's-play taking it, it did not require any skill. There was a bit of lavender stuck into the rings, and he smelt and looked at it, and then the old woman turned and looked at him with her country eyes; and then all at once, almost in spite of himself, he held out the purse to her. "Don't you see as you've dropped your purse?" he said, in a surly, angry tone, and *finished* with an oath that made the *old woman* tremble and turn pale; and



he flung away, setting his teeth and calling himself a fool. That man was not all bad,—who is? and his poor act of restitution is surely put to his credit in the ledger of his life, and will stand there when the books shall be opened. The old woman got little good from it, however, for the purse was soon taken by a less scrupulous thief.

How cold it was! The old woman shivered and drew her damp shawl round her, and longed, oh! how bitterly, for the old fireside, and the settle, worn and polished by generations of shoulders, for the arm-chair with its patchwork cushion—longed, ah! how wearily, for the grave by the churchyard wall, where the master rests free of all his troubles, and where “there’s plenty of room for I,”—and longed, too, quite as simply and pathetically, for a cup of tea out of the cracked brown teapot. But why should I dwell on the feelings of a foolish, insignificant, old woman? There are hundreds and thousands about us, whose lives are *more interesting*, whose thoughts are *more*

worth recording. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?" and yet, "Doth not God take thought for sparrows?" then, surely so may we. Does He indeed despise not the desires of such as be sorrowful? even though the sorrowful one be only an old, country woman, and her desire, a cup of tea! Then why should we call that common and uninteresting which He pitifully beholds? And we shall find no life that is not full of interest, tender feeling, noble poetry, deep tragedy, just as there is nobody without the elaborate system of nerves, and muscles, and veins, with which we are fearfully and wonderfully made.

The early November dusk was coming on before she set out on her pilgrimage again, the darkness coming all the earlier for the fog and the London smoke; and then, hardly caring which way she went, she turned her face eastward, not knowing that she was making for the very heart of *London*. The streets were even more *crowded and confusing* than they had

been in the morning, and the gas and the lighted shops, and the noise, and her own weariness, combined to increase her bewilderment.

Once as she passed round the corner of a quieter street, someone ran up against her and nearly threw her down; a lady, the old woman would have described her, smartly, even handsomely dressed, with a bright colour on her cheeks, and glowing, restless, unhappy eyes, and dry, feverish lips. She spoke a hasty word of apology, and then, all at once, gave a sharp, sudden cry, and put her hands on the old woman's shoulders, and looked eagerly into her face. Then she pushed her away with a painful, little laugh. "I thought you were my mother," she said.

"No, I never had no gals."

"You're in luck then," the girl said; "thank heaven for it."

"Was your mother, maybe, from the country?"

"Yes, she lived in Somersetshire; but *I don't* even know that she's alive, and

I think she must be dead—I hope she is—I hope it.”

There was something in the girl's voice that told of more bitter despair than her words, and the old woman put out her hand and laid it on the girl's velvet sleeve.

“My dear,” she said, “maybe I could help you.”

“Help!” was the answer. “I'm past that. There! good night, don't trouble your kind head about me.”

And then the old woman went on again, getting into narrow, darker streets, with fewer shops, and people of a rougher, poorer class. But it would overtax your patience and my powers to describe the old woman's wanderings in the maze of London. Enough to say, that when, an hour or two later, footsore and ready to drop, she stumbled along a little street near Soho Square, a woman, with a baby in her arms, uttered a loud cry of pleased recognition, and darted out to *stop her*.

“Why, it ain't never you! Whoever

would have thought of seeing you so soon? and however did you find me out? This is the house. Why, there!—there! dontee cry sure! dontee now! You're tired out. Come in and have a cup of tea. I've got the kettle boiling all ready, for my Harry 'll be in soon."

It was the young woman she travelled with the day before—only the day before, though it seemed months to look back to; only her face was bright and happy now, in spite of the fog and dirt about her, for had not her Harry a home and welcome for her, in spite of all her fears and people's evil prophecies, and was not this enough to make sunshine through the rainiest day?

Very improbable, you will say perhaps, that these two waifs, these floating straws, should have drifted together on the great ocean of London life. Yes, very improbable, well-nigh impossible, I agree, if it is mere chance that guides our way; but stranger, more improbable things happen every day; and if we mean *anything* by Providence, it is no longer

difficult to understand, for we can see the Hand leading, guiding, arranging, weaving the tangled, confused threads of human life into the grand, clear, noble pattern of Divine purpose.





## CHAPTER V.

**E**IGHTEEN months have passed away since my story began, and it is no longer dull, foggy November, but May, beautiful even in London, where the squares and parks are green and fresh, and the lilacs and laburnums in bloom, and the girls sell lilies of the valley and wallflowers in the streets, and trucks with double stocks and narcissus "all a-growing and a-blowing" pass along, leaving a sweet reviving scent behind them. The sky is blue, with great soft masses of cotton-wool cloud, and the air is balmy and pure in spite of smoke and dirt, and sweet Spring is making his power felt, even in the very *midst* of London. It is blossoming time

in the heart as well as in the Kentish apple-orchards, and the heart cannot help feeling gay and singing its happy little song even through its cares, like the poor larks in the Seven Dials' bird-shops ruffling their soft breasts and knocking their poor brown heads against their cages in their ecstasy of song.

Dr. Carter had good cause for happiness that day, though, indeed, he was moving among sickness and suffering in a great London hospital. He had some lilies in his coat that Violet fastened there with her own hands, and as she did so he had whispered, "Only another week, Violet," for their wedding-day was fixed in the next week,—and was not that a thought that suited well with the lovely May weather, to make him carry a glad heart under the lilies? The wedding had been long delayed from one cause and another, but principally because the search for the old mother had been altogether fruitless, in spite of the confidence of the *police*.

"We will find her first," Violet would



say; "we must find her, Laddie." She adopted the old name quite naturally. "And then we will talk of the wedding."

But time rolled on, days, weeks, and months, till at last it was more than a year ago that she had gone, and though they never gave up the hope of finding her, or their efforts to do so, still it no longer seemed to stand between them and give a reason for putting off the marriage, but rather to draw them nearer together, and give a reason for marrying at once. But on Dr. Carter's writing-table always stood the pair of pattens, much to the surprise of patients; but he would not have them moved, and in his heart lay the pain and regret, side by side with his love and happiness.

The doctors were making their rounds in the hospital with a crowd of medical students about them. There was a very interesting case in the accident ward, over which much time was spent, and much attention paid. I am not doctor enough to describe what the nature of the case was, and if I were, I daresay you would

not care to hear ; but it was a very interesting case to the doctors and nurses, and that means that life and death were fighting over that bed, and science bringing every reinforcement in its power in aid of the poor battered fortress that the grim king was attacking so severely. An easy victory on either one side or the other is very uninteresting to lookers-on, though of the deepest moment to the patient. And so the doctors passed on, with hardly a word, by the two next beds, in one of which life was the conqueror, hanging out his flags of triumph in a tinge of colour on the cheeks, brightness in the eyes, and vigour in the limbs ; in the other, death was as plainly to be seen in the still form and white, drawn face.

After the doctors and students had passed by and finished their round, Dr. Carter came back alone to No. 20. He had taken deep interest in the case, and had something to say further about it to *the nurse*. He was a great favourite with *the nurses*, from his courteous, gentle

manners, so they were not disposed to regard his second visit as a troublesome fidgety intrusion, as they might have done with some. He had not been quite pleased with the way in which a dresser had placed a bandage, and he altered it himself with those strong, tender fingers of his, and was just going off better satisfied when he found the flowers had dropped from his coat. If they had not been Violet's gift it would not have mattered, but he did not like to lose what she had given, and he looked about for them. They had fallen by some quick movement of his on to the next bed, where death was having an easy victory.

The old woman's arms were stretched outside the bed-clothes, and one of her hands, hardworked hands, with the veins standing up on the backs like cord, had closed, perhaps involuntarily, on the flowers, the lilies and the dainty green leaf.

"Here they are, sir," said the nurse, "they must have dropped as you turned round." And she tried to draw them

from the woman's hand, but it only closed the tighter. "She doesn't know a bit what she's about. Leave go of the flowers, there's a good woman," she said close to her ear; "the gentleman wants them."

But the hand still held them.

"Well, never mind!" Dr. Carter said, with just a shade of vexation; "let her keep them. It does not matter, and you will only break them if you try to get them away."

"She's not been conscious since they brought her in," the nurse said; "it's a street accident; knocked down by an omnibus. We don't know her name, or nothing, and no one's been to ask about her."

The doctor still stopped, looking at the lilies in the old hand.

"She is badly hurt," he said.

The nurse explained what the house surgeon had said: "Another day will see an end of it. I thought she would *have died* this morning when I first came *on*, she was restless then, and talked a

little. I fancy she's Scotch, for I heard her say 'Laddie' several times."

The word seemed to catch the otherwise unconscious ear, for the old woman turned her head on the pillow, and said feebly, "Laddie."

And then, all at once, the doctor gave a cry that startled all the patients in the ward, and made many a one lift up her head to see the cause of such a cry.

"Mother!" he cried, "mother, is it you?"

Dr. Carter was kneeling by the bed, looking eagerly, wildly, at the wan white face. Was he mad? The nurse thought he must be, and this a sudden frenzy. And then he called again—

"Mother, mother, speak to me!"

A childless mother near said afterwards she thought such a cry would have called her back from the dead, and it almost seemed to do so in this case, for the closed lids trembled and raised themselves a very little, and the drawn mouth moved into the ghost of a smile, and she said—

"Eh, Laddie, here I be."

And then the nurse came nearer to reason with the madman.

"There is some mistake," she said ;  
"this is quite a poor old woman."

And then he got up and looked at her, she said afterwards, "like my lord duke, as proud as anything."

"Yes," he said, "and she is my mother. I will make arrangements at once for her removal to my house, if she can bear it."

Ah! that was the question, and it wanted little examination or experience to tell that the old woman was past moving. The nurse, bewildered and still incredulous, persuaded him not to attempt it, and instead, her bed was moved into a small ward off the large one, where she could be left alone.

Love is stronger than death, many waters cannot drown it. Yes, but it cannot turn back those cold waters of death, when the soul has once entered them, and so Dr. Carter found that with *all his* love and with all his skill, he

could only smooth, and that but a very little, the steep, stony road down into Jordan.

He got a nurse to attend specially upon her, but he would not leave her, and the nurse said it was not much good her being there, for he smoothed her pillows, and raised her head, and damped her lips, and fanned her with untiring patience and tenderness. Once when he had his arm under her head, raising it, she opened her eyes wide, and looked at him.

"Ah! Laddie," she said, "I'm a bit tired with my journey. It's a longish way from Sunnybrook."

"Did you come from there?"

"Yes, sure, I've never been such a long way before, and I'm tired out."

"Why didn't you write?" he asked presently, when she opened her eyes again.

"I wanted to give you a surprise," she said, "and I knew as you'd be glad to see me at any time as I liked to come."

And then it dawned on him that the

past eighteen months had been blotted clean out of her memory, and that she thought she had just arrived. Then she dozed, and then again spoke, "And so this is your house, Laddie? and mighty fine it be!" looking round on the bare hospital room; "and I'm that comfortable if I wasn't so tired, but I'll be getting up when I'm rested a bit. But it do me good to see you when I opens my eyes. I've been thinking all the way how pleased you'd be." All this she said a word or two at a time, and very low and weakly, so that only a son's ear could have heard.

As the evening came on she fell asleep very quietly, such a sleep as, if hope had been possible, might have given hope. Dr. Carter left the nurse watching her and went away, got a hansom and offered the man double fare to take him to Harley Street as fast as possible. Violet had just come in from a flower-show, and looked a flower herself, with her sweet face and dainty *dress*.



"I have found her," Laddie said ;  
"Come." And she came without asking  
a question, only knowing from Laddie's  
face that there was sorrow as well as  
joy in the finding.

"She is dying," he said, as they went  
up the hospital stairs together. "Can  
you bear it?"

She only answered by a pressure of  
her hand on his arm, and they went on  
to the quiet room. There was a shaded  
light burning, and the nurse sitting by  
the bedside.

"She has not stirred, sir, since you  
left."

But even as she spoke, the old woman  
moved, and opened her eyes, looking  
first at Laddie and then on Violet.

"Who is it?" she asked.

And then Violet knelt down with her  
sweet face close to the old woman's, and  
said very softly, "Mother, I am Laddie's  
sweetheart."


"Laddie's sweetheart!" she echoed ;  
"he's over young to be wed—but there!  
I forget. He's been a good son, my

dear, always good to his old mother, and he'll be a good husband. And you'll make him a good wife, my dear, won't you? God bless you."

And then her trembling hand was feeling for something, and Laddie guessed her wish, and put his own hand and Violet's into it; two -young hands, full of life and health and pulsation, under the old, worn, hard-worked hand, growing cold and weak with death.

"God bless you, dears, Laddie and his sweetheart. But I'm a bit tired just now."

And then she dozed again, and the two sat by in the dim quiet room, drawn closer together and dearer to each other than they ever had been before, in the presence of the Great Angel of Death who was so near the old mother now. And very tenderly he did his work that night! Only a sigh and then a sudden hush, during which the listeners' pulses throbbed in their ears, as they listened for the next long-drawn, painful, difficult breath that did



not come, and then the weary limbs relaxed into the utter repose and stillness of rest after labour, for the night had come when no man can work—the holy starlit night of death, with the silver streaks of the great dawn of the Resurrection shining in the east.

For a moment they sat spell-bound, and then it was Laddie, he who had so often seen death face to face, who gave way, throwing himself on the bed with an exceeding bitter cry. "Oh, mother, mother, say you forgive me!"

What need for words? Did he not know that she forgave him? If indeed she knew that she had anything to forgive. But she was "a bit tired."

Don't you know when bedtime comes, and the nurse calls the children, how sometimes they leave their toys, which a few minutes before seemed all in all to them, without a look, and the cake unfinished, and are carried off with their heads bent down, and their eyes heavy with sleep, too tired even to say good-night, or speak a pretty, lisping word

of the play-time past, or the pleasures coming in the morning? And so it is often with us, bigger children; when the nurse Death calls us at our bedtime, we are "a bit tired," and glad to go, too sleepy even for thought or farewell.

They laid her by the old 'master in Sunnybrook churchyard, and the village folks talked long afterwards of the funeral, and how Dr. Carter, "he as used to be called Laddie," followed her to the grave, "along with the pretty young lady as he was going to marry, and, bless my heart! wouldn't the poor old soul have felt proud if she could have seen 'em? But she's better where she is, where there ain't no buryin' and no pride neither."



